1974

The development of character in the feast scenes of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Elizabeth Riley Bell
Lehigh University

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER IN THE FEAST SCENES OF *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

by

Elizabeth Riley Bell

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Committee
of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in
English

Lehigh University
1974

8-26-74

This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

September 6, 1974
(date)

Peter G. Beidler
Professor in Charge

Albert E. Hartung
Chairman of Department

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT 1

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 4

II. COURTESY AND GAWAIN'S CHARACTER. 24

III. DUALITY: Gawain's and Bercilak's Characters 40

IV. ROMANTICISM AND REALISM. 61

CONCLUDING REMARKS. 73

NOTES 75

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 81

VITA. 84

ABSTRACT

Much criticism of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight centers on the balanced and parallel construction of the poem. Criticism tends to involve six parallel situations: the arming scenes, the journeys, the descriptions of Bercilak's castle and the Green Chapel, the temptations and hunts, and the confessions. The only major scenes excluded from critical comment are the feast scenes. When one examines the sources and analogues, it becomes clear that the Gawain-poet intentionally expands and develops the feast concept. Primarily, the seven feast scenes are used to trace Gawain's character from a superlative courtly knight to a less perfect and more human figure. The first four feast scenes are used to portray Gawain's courteous traits. Initially the first feast scene at Camelot stresses the company of youthful and beautiful courtiers and their courtly courtesy. While there is no specific description of Gawain, he is notably a member of the Camelot court and shares their courteous attributes. The idealistic description of Camelot's Christmas feast also serves as a contrast to the realistic world of Bercilak's court. The castle is courtly and elegant, as is Camelot, but here age and ugliness coexist

with youth and beauty, and the blazing fires and warm furnishings remind one of the cold reality of the outside world. Gawain's courtly character begins to exhibit tinges of discourtesy when he must refuse his host's request to remain at the castle. He again finds himself in a precarious situation when he must deal with the Lady Bercilak's advances and risk offending his host or the lady. Most importantly, Gawain never recognizes that his idealistic courteous values are inadequate to deal with a realistic situation. Ultimately Gawain's courtesy fails when he is confronted with the real situation of accepting and hiding the life-saving girdle from his host. Gawain is not only discourteous but he also compounds the fault by maintaining a courteous facade and never recognizing his failure. His twice refusing to attend a final feast at the Green Chapel parallels the earlier refusal and establishes Gawain's discourteous nature. The discourteous aspect of his personality, combined with his courtly traits, serves to present a less perfect hero and a more human figure. Furthermore, when Gawain refuses Bercilak's invitation and no longer maintains a courteous facade, there is an indication that he is developing a recognition of reality and of his human frailty.

Bercilak also figures in the feast scenes and his is an ambiguous role. He is characterized as the genial

host, but his loud actions and dual nature as the Green Knight introduce threatening overtones. This ambiguity, which keeps the narrative moving, is never clarified until the end when his genial nature is confirmed. At this point, Gawain's refusal to attend the final feast also indicates a recognition that he is undeserving of Bercilak's superior hospitality and cordiality.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In reading Sir Gawain and the Green Knight one notes the exact balance and the construction of the poem. Indeed it is a functional construction which uses situations and descriptions to communicate meaning. Primarily, criticism seems to center on the meaning conveyed in six pairs of parallel situations: the beheading tests, the arming scenes, the journeys to Bercilak's castle and the Green Chapel, the descriptions of the castle and chapel, the temptations and hunts, and the confessions. Since these six situations constitute most of the poem, the only major events that remain excluded from criticism are the feast scenes. And contrary to Charles Moorman's opinion that "almost every word of the poem has been subjected to the most painstaking analysis,"[1] it becomes obvious that these feast scenes have been excluded from this "painstaking analysis." Even Larry D. Benson in his comprehensive Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (1965) omits any significant discussion of the feast scenes. It is, therefore, the purpose of this paper to determine the significance of the feast scenes and what meaning they communicate.

These feast scenes include the following verses:

Feast I (ll. 37-135, 463-499), the Christmas feast at Camelot;

Feast II (ll. 536-565), the farewell feast at Camelot;

Feast III (ll. 815-929, 940-994), the Christmas Eve feast at Bercilak's castle;

Feast IV (ll. 995-1045), the Christmas feast at Bercilak's castle;

Feast V (ll. 1648-1667), the second hunt feast;

Feast VI (ll. 1952-1997), the third hunt and farewell feast;

Feast VII (ll. 2400-2410, 2467-2471), the refusal to return to the feast.

The first hunt feast is excluded from any discussion because it is only two lines of the poem (ll. 1402-1403) and is of little importance.

Prior to a discussion of any specific meaning conveyed in the feast scenes, it is worth considering the sources of these scenes in order to determine what material was available to the Gawain-poet and how he treated it. Did he expand or alter it? A consideration of the sources and analogues will help us to determine the poet's conscious intention.

It appears that very few if any references to feast scenes exist in the sources and analogues.[2] George L.

Kittredge, Larry D. Benson, Jessie L. Weston, and Charles Moorman seem to agree that the original source for Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the Fled Bricrend. This Irish tale, however, proves of little help in supplying a source for the feast scenes. Indications of feasts exist in the Fled Bricrend but only as summary lines to conclude the action in a chapter. At Bricriu's feast Sencha quells the initial disagreement concerning the Champion's Portion, and the author concludes the action with the statement: "The feasting was then resumed; they made a circle round the fire and got 'jovial' and made merry."[3] Eventually all the Ulstermen go to Cruachan to have Ailill and Mève decide the Champion's Portion. The author uses the mention of a feast to terminate the lengthy description which relates the arrival of the three heroes, Cuchulainn, Loigaire, and Conall: "Great feasts were then prepared for them and they were there until the end of three days and of three nights."[4] In this instance, however, the reference to the feast also serves to indicate the passage of time and to separate the heroes' arrival from the next incident, which concerns the reaction of Ailill to the Ulstermen's request and the departure of Conchobar. Similar examples occur in the rest of the Fled Bricrend and serve as narrative devices either to separate or to summarize actions. These feast scenes

in the Fled Bricrend bear no resemblance to the elaborate descriptions detailed in the first and third feast scenes in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

The Fled Bricrend is one story in the Ulster Cycle, a group of tales about the hero Cuchulainn and the Ulstermen. None of the other available stories provided a source for the feast scenes. As in the Fled Bricrend, the stories referred to feasts, but there was no significant parallel to the elaborate development of the feast scenes in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Primarily the feast scenes in the Cuchulainn stories serve to continue the action. In the Intoxication of the Ulstermen Cuchulainn decides to prepare a banquet of sovereignty for Conchobar, the High-King of Ulster. At the same time, Fintain also plans a banquet for Conchobar and the preparation of both feasts causes an argument. The quarrel requires the intervention of Sencha Mac Ailill who suggests that they divide their time: "'the first half of the night to Fintain, and the last half to Cu Chulainn.'"[5] The story then goes on to relate the occurrences of the rest of the night. Similarly, The Cattle Raid of Cooley mentions a feast which provides an occasion for the drunken talk of Medb's messengers. When Daid hears what they say, he refuses to loan the Donn of Cooley to Medb, and Medb resolves to take it by force. Whenever a feast is mentioned

in the Ulster Cycle, it tends to provide a situation for some new action to take place. Oftentimes, the feast not only ends some action, as it does in the Fled Bricrend, but also allows a situation to occur which continues the action of the story.

Lanzelet, an Anglo-Norman analogue, uses a feast scene in the same manner as does the Ulster Cycle. Unlike the other sources and analogues, this analogue has only one feast scene which exhibits similarities to the first feast scene in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. In Lanzelet, Arthur refuses to eat until he hears some news: "for it was his will to partake of no food until he had heard of something which deserved to be related to his court and to all those who had come there to achieve honor."[6] One can see a direct parallel with a custom which Arthur observes in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:

> & also anoþer maneR meued him eke,
> Þat he þur3 nobelay had nomen, he wolde neuer ete
> Vpon such a dere day, er hym deuised were
> Of sum auenturus þyng an vucouþe tale.[7]
> (ll. 90-93)

> And another custom influences him also,
> Because of that he had undertaken he would not eat
> Upon such a festal day, before to him were related
> Some marvelous thing, a strange tale.[8]

The situation is the same in both works and helps to motivate the introduction of a person who tests the court (i.e., the Green Knight in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the lady with the mantle in Lanzelet). The refusal

to eat also occurs in one of the English sources, The Turke and Gowin. In this tale, however, Gawain is the one who refuses to eat until he sees a marvelous adventure:

> Sitte downe, Sir Gawaine, at the bord.'
> Sir Gawaine answered at that word,
> saith, 'nay, that may not be,
>
> 'I trow not a venturous knight shall
> sitt downe in a kings hall
> aduentures or you see.'[9]
>
> (ll. 166-171)

> Sit down, Sir Gawain, at the table.'
> Sir Gawain answered to the command,
> saying, 'no, that may not be,
>
> 'In truth an adventurous knight shall not
> sit down in a king's hall
> until you see adventures.'

The refusal in The Turke and Gowin appears to be a custom for a knight-errant, and though Arthur is not a wandering knight, the tradition apparently influences the Gawain-poet. He explains that Arthur was influenced by another custom: "& also anoþer manek meued him eke" (And another custom influenced him also--l. 90). It is quite possible that the custom which influences him is also the tradition which Gawain upholds in The Turke and Gowin. Additionally the refusal in The Turke and Gowin serves to instigate the action of the tests as it does in Lanzelet and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

Perlesvaus also utilizes feast scenes to forward the narrative action. There is a greater number of feast

scenes in Perlesvaus than in the other analogues, but most of the feasts provide only a short interlude where a story is told or news related which requires some new action by the knights. Two feast scenes, however, indicate a stronger parallel with the Sir Gawain poem. The first parallel is similar to the incidents in Lanzelet and the Turke and Gowin. Arthur and the queen are "at meat" when a damsel arrives with a coffer. After the dinner, she challenges the court to open the coffer in which lies the head of a knight. The man who opens the casket is the man who killed the knight. This feast scene provides information about the murderer of Arthur's son, continues the knightly action, and most importantly, indicates a similarity with Sir Gawain and the Green Knight when the damsel who tests the court is introduced. The second parallel is found when Arthur holds court for the first time. As the knights arrive at Arthur's court, the narrator catalogues several of the knights who are present. A similar catalogue exists in Camelot's farewell feast (Feast II) when the court gathers to bid farewell to Gawain. Similarly the Perlesvaus feast also sets Gawain apart from the court by specifically mentioning that: "neither Messire Gawain nor Lancelot came thither on that day."[10]

Another testing situation occurs in the second volume of Perlesvaus. Lancelot arrives at the Castle of the

Griffon, disarms, and sits at the dinner table. The entire court assembles for the meal, including the lord's beautiful daughter who falls in love with Lancelot. After dinner the lord submits Lancelot to a test of pulling a sword out of a column in the center of the hall. If the knight does not succeed, he will be beheaded. While the similarity of the test at the dinner exists, the feast scene does not introduce the person who tests the hero. Instead, this feast scene is notable for the mention of the assembly of people who are playing chess and other games at the court. The assembly and the occasion of dinner allows for the introduction of the daughter who sees Lancelot and immediately falls in love with him. A similarity exists between this situation and the Gawain-poet's description of the Camelot Christmas festivities (Feast I). We also find in both works the introduction of the beautiful relative (in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Bercilak's lady is introduced to Gawain at the Christmas Eve feast(Feast III). The opening description of the court is not only present in Perlesvaus but is also present in The Turke and Gowin.

The beginning of The Turke and Gowin very closely resembles the corresponding passage in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:

All England both east & west,
lords & ladyes of the best,
   they busked & made them bowne,
& when the king sate in seate,--
lords serued him att his meate,--
   into the hall a burne there cane."
(ll. 7-12)

All England both east and west,
lords and ladies of the best,
   they prepared and came,
And when the king sat in state,--
lords served him at his meat,--
   into the hall a man came.

The Turke-poet, however, appears to utilize this passage simply to provide a gathering to witness the introduction of the turk. There is no detailed description of the court nor does the event take place at a particular time of year or on a special day as it does in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

A similar opening passage, which more strongly resembles that in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, exists in the English tale of The Grene Knight. The beginning of the poem is similar to the Gawain-poet's opening lines and certainly elaborates upon the passage in The Turke and Gowin:

itt fell againe the christmase,
many came to that Lords place,
   to that worthye one
with helme on head, & brand bright,
all that tooke order of knight;
none wold linger att home.

there was noe castle nor manour free
that might harbour that companye,
   their puissance was soe great.
their tents vp thé pight
for to lodge there all that night,
   therto were sett to meate.

Messengers there came [&] went
with much victualls verament
   both by way & streete;
wine & wild fowle thither was brought,
within they spared nought
   for gold, & they might itt gett.[12]

(ll. 19-36)

Christmas came again,
many came to that Lord's place,
   to that worthy one
with their helmets on their heads, and their
   heraldics (?) bright,
all that took the order of a knight;
   none would linger at home.

there was no castle or manor
that might house all that company
   their numbers (?) were so great.
they put their tents up
to lodge there all that night,
   there they set their tables.

Messengers came and went
with much food truly
   by road and street;
wine and wild fowl was brought there,
they did not spare
   the cost, so that they might get everything (?).

The Grene Knight-poet seems intent upon impressing the size of the court upon the reader. Apparently he wished the group to be so large that it would undoubtedly contain Gawain. This is necessary because, as the reader learns later, Agostes sends her son-in-law, Bredbeddle, to Arthur's court expressly to bring back Gawain. This is done so that Gawain can be brought to her daughter, who

is in love with him. The intention here seems to be to emphasize the size of the gathering and to provide a stage upon which the author introduces Bredbeddle. Similarly, the feast at Bredbeddle's castle parallels Feast III, the Christmas Eve celebration at Bercilak's castle, but again the purpose is merely to introduce Bredbeddle's wife and initiate the action of the temptation:

> into a chamber thé went a full great speed;
> there thé found all things readye att need,
> I date safelye swere;
> fier in chambers burning bright,
> candles in chandlers burning light;
> to supper thé went full yare.
>
> he sent after his Ladye bright
> to come to supp with that gentle Knight,
> & shee came blythe with-all;
> forth shee came then anon,
> her Maids following her eche one
> in robes of rich pall.
>
> as shee sate att her supper,
> euer-more the Ladye clere
> Sir Gawaine shee looked vpon.
> when the supper it was done,
> shee tooke her Maids, & to her chamber gone.
>
> he cheered the Knight & gave him wine,
> & said, 'welcome, by St. Martin.'[13]
>
> (ll. 307-325)
>
> they quickly went into the room;
> there they found all things they might need,
> I swear by it;
> the fires in the room burned bright,
> candles in candlesticks burned light;
> to supper they went eagerly.

he sent after his bright Lady
to come and eat with that gentle knight,
   And she came happily;
she came forth then,
each one of her maids following her
   in dresses of rich purple.

as she sat at her supper,
evermore the bright Lady
   looked upon Sir Gawain.
when the supper was finished,
she took her maids and went to her toom.

he cheered the knight and gave him wine,
And said, 'welcome, by St. Martin.'

The two analogues which contain incidents that bear the closest resemblance to events in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight are The Taill of Rauf Coilyear and Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle. There are two feast scenes in Rauf Coilyear which are significant because they juxtapose each other. The first feast at the collier's house reflects the Christmas Eve feast at Bercilak's (Feast III) in Sir Gawain. The king is separated from his retinue and wanders until he finds the collier at nightfall. The collier tells him to lead his wife into dinner, but when the king shows some hesitation, the collier hits him for not doing as he requested. In contrast when the collier goes to the palace to visit the king at Christmas, he is treated with extreme courtesy. The meal (with all kinds of food) is held in a great hall and parallels the Christmas feast at Camelot (Feast I) in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. A juxtaposition between the two Rauf Coilyear feasts exists to portray the courtesy of the king. In Sir Gawain and

the Green Knight the Camelot feast (Feast I) and the feast at Bercilak's castle (Feast III) are also juxtaposed. The Gawain-poet, however, contrasts the ideal youth of Camelot with the realism of Bercilak's court. The poet also utilizes the fact that it is Christmas to contrast the youthful innocence of the Camelot world with the harsh reality of the cold world outside.

The Carl of Carlisle also bears certain similarities to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The first feast scene in The Carl of Carlisle depicts the courtesy of Gawain by contrasting it with the discourtesy of Sir Kay and the bishop. This banquet also introduces the Carl's wife whose description matches the portrayal of Bercilak's wife:

> Of curttessy sche was perfette.
> Her roode was reede, her chekus rounde,
> A fey[e]rror myght not goo on grounde,
> Ne lowelyur of syghte.
>
> Sche was so gloryis and soo gay
> I can not rekon her araye;
> Sche was so gayly dyghte.[14]
>
> (ll. 366-372)

> She was perfectly courteous.
> Her complexion was red, her cheeks full,
> A fairer one might not walk on the earth,
> There was no lovelier one in appearance.
>
> She was so glorious and so gay
> I cannot describe her clothing;
> She was so gaily decked out.

In both The Carl of Carlisle and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Gawain's courtesy is stressed before he meets the

lord's beautiful wife, who is involved in the testing of Gawain. The second feast in The Carl of Carlisle is a return feast. After Gawain passes his test, the Carl asks him and the king to return for a feast. The court does return for a fabulous banquet and the Carl is knighted. This is contrary to Gawain's refusal to return to the feast in Sir Gawain. Indeed, Gawain refuses to return when he fails to pass the test of courtesy. Gawain's refusal, however, is the beginning of a development of his character which has been traced throughout the poem. While the Gawain-poet examines the hero's character throughout the poem, the Carl-poet is not concerned with the development of Gawain's values, ideals, or character.

There are similarities between Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the analogues mentioned above. What then did the Gawain-poet do with the material available to him? He apparently borrows the custom of the refusal to eat, but he expands it into more than a tradition. While the refusal to eat in the analogues introduces the person who tests the court, the refusal in Sir Gawain goes beyond the simple explanation of motivation. Arthur's refusal to eat tends to reinforce the Gawain-poet's portrayal of the king as "sum-quat chilgered" (having somewhat childish behavior-l. 86). The young king's characterization also reinforces the youthful, innocent court characterization of Camelot.

The analogue-poets utilize the assembling of a court to introduce different characters or to gather all the characters together for some event to take place. The Gawain-poet assembles the court at a feast (Feast III) to introduce the Lady Bercilak who later tests Gawain. Her presence is not just to test Gawain at one obvious time, but rather the poet uses her as a person to whom Gawain can exhibit his courteous values. She is also utilized as a person to subtly test Gawain's courteous values by placing him in a situation where he must offend her or her husband. Most notably, however, the Gawain-poet uses an assembly of courtiers to characterize Gawain. The hero is included in the gathering at Camelot and then the Gawain-poet continues to describe the courteous qualities of the people which would also include Gawain. The courtiers at Bercilak's castle are also employed to add to the initial characterization by reinforcing the established qualities of Gawain. The Christmas Eve feast at Bercilak's castle (Feast III) also provides a characterization of Bercilak when Gawain evaluates the traits of his host. In examining the parallel incidents in the analogues it is necessary to establish the point that the Gawain-poet did consciously expand and utilize the feast concept. He expands the available material and creates new material for additional feast scenes in an effort to fulfill certain structural and

stylistic purposes. It is the purpose of the rest of this paper to examine how and why the Gawain-poet expanded and developed the feast material.

In the second chapter I shall discuss Gawain's development from a perfect courtier to a more human character in relation to the quality of courtesy. Feast I, the Christmas feast at Camelot, portrays Gawain as a virtuous, courteous character through an association with the courtly, courteous company at Camelot. At the farewell feast (Feast II) Gawain is set apart from the court by the feast which is held in his honor, by a new set of adjectives used to describe him, and by the fact that he physically removes himself from Camelot. It appears that Gawain is divorcing himself from all social and courtly associations with Camelot. Although the Gawain-poet wishes to remove the hero from Camelot, he retains the courtly connections with King Arthur's court. He manages to maintain the courteous ties by the hero's courtly leave-taking and by his actions when he arrives at Bercilak's court. Not only does Gawain exhibit an exemplary courtesy, but also the courtiers catalogue all his courteous qualities. Even though Gawain exhibits courtly traits, it is not until Bercilak's Christmas feast (Feast IV) that we see his expertise at "luf-talkyng." Until this point the reader sees only the courteous actions of a perfect courtier. In Feast V, following

the second day of hunting, Gawain battles with his natural passion to react to the lady's advances. If he submits to her advances, he offends his host; and if he refuses the lady, he offends her. He eventually succumbs to his passion--not for the lady but to save his life. Gawain accepts a magic girdle from the lady, and commits a discourteous act by hiding the girdle from his host. The hero refuses to recognize his discourteous fault until the Green Knight reveals that he knew about the hidden girdle. When Gawain is confronted with this information, he accepts his failing, and he twice refuses Bercilak's invitation to return to the feast. When Gawain accepts the consequences of his discourtesy, he refuses the invitation because he no longer deserves the hospitality of Bercilak.

I examine the personalities of Bercilak and Gawain as churl and courtier in the third chapter. The Christmas and farewell feast at Camelot and Bercilak's Christmas Eve feast (Feasts I-III) develop Gawain's courteous character. As I mentioned in the second chapter, the portrait of the perfect courtier is completed with an exhibition of Gawain's "luf-talkyng." Feast III characterizes Bercilak as a genial host, but Bercilak's dual nature as the Green Knight introduces a threatening note. The host's loud, brash actions substantiate the churlish aspect of his personality. Bercilak is a mixture of churlishness and cordial-

ity and his character remains ambiguous throughout the rest of the feast scenes. The ambiguity is perpetuated since Gawain's perspective is limited. At Bercilak's Christmas feast (Feast IV) Gawain begins to adopt some of the churlish traits which his host seems to exhibit, when he makes a rash offer which he cannot fulfill. By refusing Bercilak's invitation to stay, Gawain reneges on his offer to do as his host wishes. The hero is able to redeem his courtesy when he accepts Bercilak's second invitation to stay at his castle. Gawain's rash statement places him in the situation of performing a discourtesy to his host and indicates the development of the discourteous side of his nature. At the feast following the second day of hunting (Feast V) Gawain struggles with the churlish aspect of his personality. He finds himself in the situation of offending his host if he submits to Lady Bercilak's advances and of offending the lady if he does not. Gawain manages to avoid the issue so that he offends no one. Eventually Gawain commits a discourtesy to his host when he hides the life-saving girdle from Bercilak. Furthermore, the hero compounds his failure when he continues a courteous facade and never recognizes his discourteous fault. The double refusal at the Green Chapel (Feast VII) establishes Gawain's discourtesy when he again refuses Bercilak's invitations. This is a repetition of

his behavior in Feast IV, where he had refused his host. This time, however, Gawain does not redeem his courtesy by accepting the second request. Instead he again refuses Bercilak's offer and the discourteous nature is established in the character of the perfect courtier. This combination of the two traits of his personality, however, creates a more human character and a less perfect hero. Feast VII also serves to clarify the ambiguity of Bercilak's personality. His genial nature predominates with no suggestion of churlishness. The ambiguity which continued the action of the poem is resolved.

In the fourth chapter I examine a duality of romanticism and realism in the feast scenes. Gawain, the perfect knight, adheres to the romantic ideal of courtly courtesy and eventually moves toward a recognition of the realistic world. The first evidence of the juxtaposition of idealism and realism is seen in the description of Camelot (Feast I) and Bercilak's court (Feast III). The portrayal of Camelot emphasizes its courtliness and the spring-like youth and beauty of the courtiers. Everything is superlative and a controlled precision identifies the regulated actions of the people. Bercilak's castle is courtly and elegant, but it is not characterized by precise movements. Instead, slow action and graciousness tend to depict the court. The beauty and youth of Camelot's people are re-

presented in one character, Lady Bercilak. In contrast the ugliness and age of her old companion provide one with a realistic perspective of the court. The elegant trappings of furs and tapestries also remind the reader of the cold realistic world outside the castle walls. With the exception of the first part of Feast I, which serves to characterize the idealistic Gawain, each feast scene possesses elements of idealism balanced by elements of realism. Indeed, even the idealistic Camelot begins to exhibit tinges of realism at Gawain's farewell feast (Feast II). The reality of the court is not transferred to Gawain because he is set apart from the court. As I explain in the second chapter, the Gawain-poet retains the courtly association with Gawain and reinforces it with the comments of Bercilak's courtiers in Feast III. When the dilemma of offending either his host or the lady occurs in Feast V, Gawain does not recognize that this is a realistic situation which his idealism cannot handle. Neither can Gawain face the reality of his discourtesy to Bercilak in Feast VI. Gawain, therefore, seeks the security of courtliness and maintains his courteous show of manners. The hero is forced by the Green Knight's revelation in Feast VII to recognize that his romantic ideal is inadequate to solve the problems of a real world. The double refusal indicates an acceptance of reality when he no longer continues the facade of courtly manners.

CHAPTER II

COURTESY AND GAWAIN'S CHARACTER

One's initial reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight seems to suggest that Sir Gawain is involved in only one test--the beheading test at the Green Chapel. A more careful reading reveals that several tests actually occur at Bercilak's castle prior to the encounter at the Green Chapel. While these tests concern Gawain's courage, chastity, and courtesy, the discussion of this paper involves only the feast scenes which detail the development of Gawain and the quality of his courtesy.

Indeed, it becomes obvious that the main concern of the feast scenes is courtesy and more particularly its relation to the development of Gawain's character. It is worth considering at this point whether the feast scenes involve courtesy in all its aspects or in only one aspect. The complexity of the term and the different meanings attached to courtesy are best discussed by A. C. Spearing:

> Cortaysye is perhaps the central value of the courtly way of life, as indeed its name suggests: it is the virtue belonging to courts. It has a wide range of meaning, in which religious senses merge into secular, and the ethical may be delicately edged towards the erotic (as it is by the lady in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight). In its religious sense, cortaysye is associated with the grace of mercy displayed by God and mediated by the Blessed

> Virgin...[,] In its secular range of meaning, cortaysye includes thoughtfulness for others, refined manners, deference, the service of ladies, and elegant love-making.[1]

While the entire poem treats all these aspects of courtesy, the feast scenes involve courtesy as "the central value of the courtly way of life" which embodies the secular qualities.

Feast I, Camelot's Christmas feast, and Feast II, the farewell feast a year later, emphasize the courtly life and Gawain's association with it in order to establish his courteous character. His courtesy is reaffirmed in Feast III as noted by Bercilak's courtiers:

> 'Now schal we semlych se sle3te3 of þewe3
> & þe teecheles termes of talkyng noble;
> Wich spede is in speche, vnspurd may we lerne,
> Syn we haf fonged þat fyne fader of nurture.
> (11.916-919)

> 'Now shall we see comely examples of manners
> And the spotless terms of noble talk;
> What profit is in speech, unasked may we learn,
> Since we have received that fine father of good breeding.

J. F. Kiteley makes the following observation about the court's comments:

> Gawain's reputation as the courteous knight par excellence had presumably gone before him, and as soon as his name is made known to Bertilak's court, certain expectations are expressed. . .All these are reasonable expectations, especially when we remember that 'nurture' often implies courtesy in its narrowest sense, that of manners only. But the courtiers expect more from Gawain, the courteous:
>
> I hope þat may hym here
> Schal lerne of luf-talkyng.
> (11.926-927)

> There is no break whatsoever in the continuity of the passage, and a clear connexion seems to be established in the minds of Bertilak's courtiers between good manners and the talk of love.[2]

Feast III, Bercilak's Christmas Eve feast, makes the distinction of adding "love-talking" (similar to Spearing's "love-making") to Gawain's qualities of courtliness. This addition prepares the reader for Feasts IV and V which demonstrate Gawain's abilities in "love-talking." The Christmas feast at Bercilak's castle (Feast IV) completes the portrayal of Gawain's courteous qualities. The banquet following the second hunt feast (Feast V) depicts Gawain's courteous qualities in conflict when he does not know whether to submit to the lady's advances and offend his host or refuse her advances and offend the lady. He is angry with himself for even reacting to her overtures, but he never realizes that his reaction is a natural passion. Instead Gawain attempts to evenly distribute his courtesies and offend no one. The suggestion, in Feast V, of Gawain's natural reaction to the lady prepares the reader for the hero's breach of courtesy in Feast VI. His discourteous behavior of hiding the girdle from his host occurs because of his natural desire to save his life. In this feast, however, Gawain fails not only to accept his natural passion, but he also fails even to recognize his discourteous fault. Gawain has failed as the perfect courtly knight and a development of his character

cannot begin until he recognizes his fault. Gawain accepts the responsibility of his discourteous behavior in Feast VII when he refuses the undeserved hospitality from Bercilak. Gawain has failed, but his character begins to develop when he recognizes and accepts that failure.

I shall attempt a complete examination of Gawain's character by tracing the development of it and his courtesy in the feast scenes. At first glance Feast I does not seem totally relevant because it primarily devotes itself to a detailed description of the court and the Christmas festivities at Camelot. Marie Borroff points out that "neither Arthur nor any of his knights is described at all. The only detail of personal description prior to the entrance of the Green Knight is the reference to Guenevere's yzen gray (82)."[3] Furthermore Feast I acknowledges only the presence of Gawain: "There gode Gawan wat3 grayþed Gwenore bisyde" (There good Gawain was arrayed beside Guenevere--l. 109). One must note that this slight indication of Gawain is significant within the context of the description of the court at Camelot. As J. A. Burrow puts it, "the first view of any hero helps to establish our sense of the relationship existing between him and the society to which he belongs . . . this relationship is usually a matter of some importance."[4]

Since Gawain is not described in this feast scene, one

must look to the description of the surrounding court to understand his qualities. Primarily the poet suggests that the people at Camelot are a brotherhood of men by referring to the "mony luflych lorde" (many comely lords --1.38) as "alle þo rich broþer" (all the noble brethren --1.39). Marie Borroff continues by noting that: "in the passage from Gawain, lordes, lede3, breþer, tulkes, and kni3tes refer alike to all the members of a single group; the poet emphasizes their community of spirit as 'brethern' of the Round Table, and the qualities of excellence in which all share alike."[5] Furthermore the Gawain-poet establishes Gawain as being a member of the court by seating him among his peers and partaking in the festivities. By being a member of this group the narrator suggests that the hero also possesses the courteous virtues extolled at Camelot. While it should be remembered that Gawain is eventually tested for the three virtues of chastity, courage, and courtesy, there is no significant indication of either chastity or courage in this feast scene. In particular the quality of courtesy dominates the tone of the Christmas feast at Arthur's court. One learns that "Arthure wolde not ete til al were serued" (Arthur would not eat until all were served --1.85), thus establishing the mood by his courteous action. The lines referring to "gentyle kni3te," "most kyd

kny3tes," "comlokest kyng," and "fayre folk" utilize adjectives suggesting courtesy:

> Justed ful jolile þise gentyle kni3tes.
> (1.42)
>
> Jousted full gaily these gentle knights.

> Þe most kyd kny3tes vnder Krystes seluen,
> & þe louelokkest ladies þat euer lif haden,
> & he þe comlokkest kyng þat þe court haldes;
> For al wat3 þis fayre folk in her first age.
> (11.51-54)
>
> The most renowned knights under Christ himself,
> And the loveliest ladies that ever lived,
> And he the comeliest king that the court had ever had;
> For all these fair folk were in their first age.

Essentially the mood of Camelot is gaiety and mirth with particular attention to courtly politeness among the brothers of the Round Table. Feast I concerns a description of the courtesy and fraternity existing at Camelot rather than a direct explanation of Gawain's character. Consequently one also sees Gawain as a member of the courteous Round Table. The scene does not, as Alain Renoir suggests, set Gawain apart from and above the other people. Renoir states that:

> As the guests are called to dinner, he is distinguished with a special mark of honor. Not only is he seated among the greatest lords at the elevated end of the table, but his place is next to Queen Guenevere herself. At this point, it is reasonable to suppose that Gawain feels at least some urge toward momentary pride at the great honor conferred upon him. We are never explicitly told whether it is so; but it is significant that he not only occupies the upper part of the picture with which we are presented, but that he has no sooner sat down than we are made to hear the blasts of the instrument most symbolic of pride--

the trumpet.[6]

To agree with these statements is to ignore the preceding portion of the feast scene where the Gawain-poet utilizes various adjectives to suggest a mood of close camaraderie. Renoir also notes that Gawain is seated at the elevated end of the table and consequently may feel "momentary pride at the great honor conferred upon him." Although Gawain sits at the elevated end of the table he still sits among his peers. Furthermore in recognizing the blasts of the trumpets as symbolic of pride, Renoir is ignoring the rest of the music in the feast scene. In considering the total effect of the Christmas festivities, Burrow more appropriately states that Gawain "is. . . essentially the straightforward 'gode Gawan' of many other medieval English romances--above all a social being, a 'brother of the Round Table'."[7]

It is the "straightforward 'gode Gawan'" who laughs with Arthur about the Christmas game when the Green Knight leaves the court. While the beheading incident is a "A meruayl among þo menne" (A marvel among men--1.466), Gawain's "grenne" (grin--1.464) is a considerate gesture to restore the festive mood. Indeed, Arthur, "þe hende kyng" (the courteous king--1.467) continues this gesture by placing the Queen at ease "wyth cortays speche" (with courteous speech--1.469). Having attempted to restore the tenor of mirth, Arthur and Gawain return to the table to

continue the festivities. Interestingly, Gawain still remains a part of the court rather than a person elevated above the other people at Camelot. He and Arthur turn together and the unchanged adjective "gode," used again to describe Gawain, still suggests his brotherhood with the Round Table:

> Þenne þay bo3ed to a borde þise burnes to-geder,
> Þe kyng & þe gode kny3t, & kene men hem serued
> Of alle dayntye3 double, as derrest my3t falle.
> (11.481-483)
>
> Then they moved to a table these men together,
> The king and the good knight, and strong men served them
> Of all dainties double, costliest as might happen to be.

It should be remembered that at the first feast the poet considers Gawain a member of the Round Table and by association suggests that the "gode kny3t" practices the courtesy in evidence at Arthur's court. At Feast II a year later Gawain moves away from the court and Arthur, and he is set apart by the fact that the feast is made in his honor. The Gawain-poet further removes the hero from his previous fraternity by utilizing one word in particular to refer to Gawain. During the Christmas festivities, the narrator suggests a gentleness by mentioning the knight as "Gawen", "sir Gawan", "gode kny3t", and "gode Gawan." In relation to the other words even the term "kny3t" implies a courtliness rather than creating the impression of a warrior knight. Yet in Feast II, the first word describing Gawain is "freke3" (warrior--l.537) and twice

afterward the poet refers to the hero as "kny3t" (knight--11.557 and 562). This change from a courtly knight to a warrior knight serves to remove Gawain from the court of Camelot. Burrow, however, reminds us that the catalogue of all the knights at this feast indicates that a link with Camelot still exists. Burrow states that the list "serves as a reminder that the court, though elsewhere it is always. . . presented as a corporate anonymous whole."[8] The poet also supports this statement by still referring to the court as a "company": "Alle þis compayny of court" (All this court company--1.556). These arguments seem contradictory in that the poet seems to remove Gawain from the court, but he still maintains the idea of a group of brothers. The previous suggestion that Gawain adopts the courteous qualities of the court since he is a member of that group, possibly explains this paradox. By removing the hero from the group at court it is also possible that by association Gawain removes himself from the courteous qualities of Camelot. In order to move Gawain away from the court but still maintain the virtues of the Round Table, the poet dramatically sets the knight apart from the court by his impending journey, by a new set of adjectives to describe him, and by the special tribute afforded him. The poet, however, retains Gawain's connection with the courtly courtesy by indicat-

ing the court as a "compayny" and by referring to those people as "Kny3te3 ful cortays & comlych ladies" (Knights full courteous and comely ladies--l.539). Most importantly, the poet unquestionably allows Gawain to dramatically assert his own courteous virtues in the formal speech to King Arthur:

> 'Now, lege lorde of my lyf, leue I yow ask;
> 3e knowe þe cost of þis cace, kepe I no more;
> To telle you tene3 þer-of neuer bot trifel.
> (ll.545-547)

> 'Now liege lord of my life, I ask you for my leave;
> You know the cost of this deed, no more do I desire;
> To tell you the difficulties it is nothing but a trifle.

Gawain reinforces this speech by courteously dismissing the concerns of the court in the following lines:

> Þe kny3t mad ay god chere,
> & sayde, 'quat schuld I wonde?
> Of destines derf & dere
> What may mon do bot fonde?'
> (ll. 562-565)

> All that time the knight made good cheer,
> And said, 'Why should I hesitate?
> In destinies hard and sweet
> What may a man do but try?'

While the reader now sees Gawain as the warrior-knight traveling alone from Camelot, the poem also firmly establishes the previously suggested quality of courtesy by allowing the knight to dramatically portray his courteous characteristics.

When Gawain arrives at Bercilak's castle he drops the warrior-knight image and his courteous virtues become the obvious point of Feast III, the Christmas Eve celebration

at Bercilak's Castle. In Feast III the knight removes his armor and accepts the fine clothing more suited to the leisure at court. Once again the author returns to a new variety of words to designate Gawain as a courtly figure. Not only is he Gawain the "kny3t" but also he is "wyz", "prynce", "Gawayn", and "sir Gawan", The attention of Bercilak's attendants, the courtly surroundings, and the elegant feast help to establish the courteous tone which Gawain initiates when he enters the court: "For to mete wyth menske þe mon on þe flor" (For to meet with courtesy the man [host] on the floor--l.834). This feast scene relies not only upon suggestion to portray Gawain's courteous quality, but also allows us to see Gawain graciously meet his host at the beginning of the scene. Feast III again dramatizes Gawain's graciousness when he meets Bercilak's lady and the old woman who accompanies her:

> When Gawayn gly3t on þat gay þat graciously loked,
> Wyth leue la3t of þe lorde he [l] ent hem a3aynes;
> Þe alder he haylses, heldande ful lowe,
> Þe loueloker he lappe3 a lyttel in arme3,
> He kysses hir comlyly & kny3tly he mele3;
> Þay kallen hym of a-quoyntaunce, & he hit quyk aske3
> To be her seruaunt sothly, if hem-self lyked.
> (11.970-976)

> When Gawain looked on that gay lady that looked graciously,
> With leave received from the lord he came toward them;
> He salutes the elder, bowing full low,
> The lovelier he enfolded a little in his arms,
> He kisses her comely [agreeably] and courteously he speaks;

They call him an acquaintance, and he quickly asks
To be their servant truly, if it pleased them.

Although this Christmas Eve feast (Feast III) impresses the court's and Gawain's courteous behavior upon the reader, the poet also introduces a new element into the situation. As stated previously, Bercilak's courtiers are aware of Gawain's courteous reputation and expect a display of manners from the "fader of nurture" (father of good-breeding--l. 919). Not only does the court expect a show of Gawain's courtesy, but it also expects to "lerne of luf-talkyng" (learn of love-talking--l. 927). Feast III certainly provides Gawain's dramatic exhibition of those qualities described by courtly and secular courtesy, but it is in Feast IV, the Christmas celebration, that the picture is completed and we see Gawain's abilities at "luf-talkyng." It is worth noting in Feast IV that none of the other qualities of secular courtesy are demonstrated. Instead the poet shows Gawain engaged only in conversation with Lady Bercilak. Bercilak's Christmas festivities emphasize "love-talking," one particular aspect of Gawain's courtesy:

Such comfort of her compaynye ca3ten to-geder
Þur3 her dere dalyaunce of her derne worde3,
Wyth clene cortays carp, closed fro flyþe.
(ll. 1011-1013)

Such pleasure from their company [they] received together
Through the precious love-talk of their confidential words,
With entirely courteous talk, enclosed from sin.

The preceding feast scenes (Feast I-III) stress the courteous qualities mentioned by Spearing (i.e. "thoughtfulness for others, refined manners, deference, the service of ladies"). The emphasis on Gawain's "love-talking" in Feast IV completes the portrayal of Gawain's courteous qualities.

When the portrait of Gawain the courteous hero is completed, the second hunt feast (Feast V) introduced an element of conflict which tests Gawain's courtesy. If Gawain submits to the lady's advances, he violates the courtesy due to his host; but if he bluntly rejects her advances, Gawain violates the courtesy due to the lady. A. C. Spearing summarizes lines 1657-1663 in his statement that courtesy: "weakens his resistance to her temptation in several ways. One is that, inasmuch as cortaysye involves unfailing deference to ladies and perfect politeness in conversation with them, it prevents him from taking the extreme measure of a pointblank refusal of the Lady's advances. The pleasure with which he responds to them shows that this would not be his natural reaction, but, were it not for his cortaysye, it might seem a way out of his intolerable situation."[9] Gawain remains faithful to his courteous virtues by not taking any decisive action. While Gawain sees the dilemma as a conflict of demands upon his courtesy, the reader should

note that the hero's reaction to her "stille stollen countenaunce" (sweet stolen looks--l. 1659) makes him "wroth with hym-seluen" (angry with himself--l. 1660). Why should Gawain's reaction to her advances make him angry unless Gawain is reacting in a positive fashion and is in danger of being discourteous to his host? Indeed, it appears that Gawain is fighting a natural reaction to the lady's advances. While Gawain sees the dilemma as a conflict of demands upon his courtesy, the Gawain-poet seems to suggest that the perfect, courtly hero is also subject to very human and natural passions. Gawain does not seem to recognize his feelings since he retains his superior courteous virtues by dealing with the lady with utmost courtesy ("dalt with hir al in daynte"--l. 1662).

After the third day of hunting (Feast VI) Gawain confronts his host and consciously conceals the girdle when they exchange the day's winnings. The suggestion of Gawain's basic human passion in Feast V develops into a reality in Feast VI. The passion does not involve the lady, but rather the passion for one's life. His desire to save his life causes Gawain to violate his quality of courtesy by hiding the girdle from Bercilak. Although the reader recognizes Gawain's failure, the hero fails to realize that he has submitted to his natural passion and

failed in his courtesy to his host. Gawain exhibits no awareness of his discourtesy and consequently reveals no guilt. On the contrary, the hero continues his role as a courteous knight by partaking in the "merþe & mynstralsye" (mirth and minstrelsy--l. 1952):

Þay maden as mercy as any men mo3ten. (l. 1953)

They made as merry as any men might.

Boþe þe mon & þe meyny maden mony iape3. (l. 1957)

Both the men and the household made many jests.

Whether Gawain attempts later to deal with his failure when he is in the solitude of his chamber is not resolved in Feast VI. In an attempt to clarify Gawain's actions one must examine the double refusal at the Green Chapel (Feast VII). Not only has Gawain breached his courtesy to his host, but also he seems to compound his fault by not recognizing what he has done. Gawain does not accept his discourteous failure until the Green Knight reveals that he knew about the hero's discourtesy. When Gawain realizes that someone else knows about his discourtesy, he is able to accept his fault. One cannot help thinking that Gawain would not have confronted his failing if the Green Knight had not revealed that he also knew about the hidden girdle. It is a sour note on which to end, and Gawain certainly does not appear the hero if he must accept

his discourtesy under the duress of the Green Knight's revelations. It is, however, the double refusal (Feast VII) which provides the positive element. Gawain's double refusal to Bercilak's invitations indicates that Gawain realizes that he is not entitled to Bercilak's courtesy. Because he no longer deserves Bercilak's hospitality, he must refuse his host's invitations. His refusals seem to indicate that Gawain recognizes his failure; and more importantly, he accepts the consequences of his actions.

CHAPTER III: DUALITY

GAWAIN'S AND BERCILAK'S CHARACTERS

In the last chapter I discussed courtesy and Gawain's character. This chapter again considers Gawain's courteous virtues but also examines the dual personalities of Gawain and Bercilak as courtier and as churl. Feast I, the Christmas celebration at Camelot, Feast II, the farewell feast a year later, and Feast III, the Christmas Eve banquet at Bercilak's castle, establish Gawain as the courteous knight. Feast III depicts Bercilak as the genial host and also introduces a threatening note into the character of Bercilak because of his dual role as host and Green Knight. The reasons for Bercilak's deception are not clear and therefore his personality remains ambiguous. The ambiguity is not resolved until Feast VII when Gawain twice refuses Bercilak's invitations to return to the feast. Beginning in Feast IV Gawain begins to adopt the churlish aspects which were only implied about Bercilak in the Christmas Eve feast. Feast IV, Bercilak's Christmas celebration, Feast V, the banquet following the second day of hunting, and Feast VI, the feast following the third day of hunting, indicate the development of the discourteous side of Gawain's nature. He is always able, however,

to redeem his discourteous actions as in Feast IV and maintains his courteous virtues as in Feasts V and VI. Feast VII, the double refusal at the Green Chapel, establishes the existence of his discourteous nature. The establishment of this fault in the "perfect" courtier combines the two traits of his personality and creates a new human figure. Bercilak's gracious manner predominates the last scene and the implication of the sinister duality is totally discarded. The ambiguity which kept the action progressing is resolved and the initial impression of gracious Bercilak is confirmed.

It is important to remember that, although the poem includes a detailed description of the Green Knight in the beheading scene, the first time the reader sees him in the feast scenes is as Bercilak, the host of the Christmas Eve feast (Feast III). In comparison to the description of the Green Knight, the description of Bercilak in the feast scenes is not as detailed but it does provide the reader with an image of Bercilak as host:

> Gawayn gly3t on þe gome þat godly hym gret,
> & þu3t hit a bolde burne þat þe bur3 a3te,
> A hoge haþel for þe none3, & of hyghe eldee;
> Brode, bry3t wat3 his berde, & al beuer-hwed,
> Sturne, stif on þe stryþþe on stal-worth schonke3.
> Felle face as þe fyre, & fre of hys speche;
> & wel hym semed forsoþe, as þe segge þu3t,
> To lede a lortschyp in lee of leude3 ful gode.
> (ll. 842-849)

Gawain looked on that man who greeted him well,
And thought it a bold man that the castle possessed,
A huge man for that time, and of hyghel age;
Broad, bright was his beard, and beaver-hued,
Stout, stiff in a striding position on stalwart legs,
A face fierce as a fire, and noble was his speech;
Well he seemed forsooth, as the man thought,
To lead a lordship of the nation full well in safety.

As Gawain and we will eventually learn, his host and the Green Knight are the same man. Consequently we see a dual nature in Bercilak during the feast scenes. The court's friendly and courteous reception of Gawain seems to be quite genuine. In contrast to the cold world outside of Bercilak's walls the warm fires and elegant trappings present a picture of secure well-being. Although we know that the host is the Green Knight, the well-being of the courtiers in the Christmas Eve scene (Feast III) makes it difficult to believe that anything evil could exist at Bercilak's court. J. A. Burrow suggests that the aura of well-being is maintained so that Gawain is totally disarmed in preparation for the temptation tests: "his [the Gawain-poet's] plan required that Gawain should be 'disarmed', metaphorically as well as literally, before being submitted to his crucial tests; and this disarming of the hero required that the castle should seem to him to be another Camelot--a house of mirth, full of friendly and congenial people, and presided over by a high-spirited lord with a beautiful and amiable wife."[2] In an attempt

to fuse the sinister elements and the element of well-being, A. C. Spearing supports Burrow in that the juxtaposition of the sinister element and the element of well-being implies the existence of impending danger at Bercilak's castle: "the meaning of the relationship of the two plot elements, if something complex and concrete can be expressed in simple terms, is surely that there lies hidden in courtly society a danger as extreme and unpredictable as that so obviously represented by the Green Knight and his challenge."[3]

The note of danger is again introduced when Bercilak learns of Gawain's name:

> When þe lorde hade lerned þat he þe leude hade,
> Loude la3ed he þerat, so lef hit hym þo3t.
>
> (ll, 908-909)

> When the lord had learned that he had the man,
> Loud laughed he thereat, so agreeable he thought it.

Again Burrow notes that if this is to be taken in the evil sense that Bercilak has finally caught his victim, then the act of cordiality is only to deceive Gawain. The words, "When þe lorde hade lerned" (When the lord had learned--l.908) leads the reader to believe that Gawain's identity was related to him in private. Consequently, who would Bercilak be trying to deceive? Burrow comes to the conclusion that "in the absence of any clearly articulated sinister meaning, one finds oneself thinking simply of a genial host rejoicing at the prospect of a distinguished

and interesting guest."[4]

Possibly the duality does exist as a premonition of the imminent danger in the bedroom temptations, but it is difficult to so easily dismiss the duality of Bercilak's character when one considers how he is portrayed in the poem. The reader's first glimpse of him in the feast scenes is as a genial host greeting his guest with courtly courtesy. At times, however, he is portrayed by dramatic actions which are opposed to courtly qualities. Bercilak laughs loudly, leaps about the room, and is generally characterized by loud actions. Larry D. Benson suggests a contrast between the loud host and the passive Gawain: "he [Gawain] usually 'quoth' his speeches, whereas his challenger and host shout and roar their words....Likewise, at Bercilak's castle Gawain sits quietly with the ladies while his host leaps aloft, calls for mirth, snatches off his hood and hangs it on a spear (vv. 981-983)."[5] It should be noted that the emphasis here is on Bercilak's uncourtliness--not on the danger he suggests. Although his actions may be loud and brash, he does not necessarily impose a threat. Benson continues:

> His [Bercilak] passion for hunting and the churlish vigor of his action and speech reinforce this basic aspect of his character [the churlishness], but he has none of the vices his grotesque appearance leads us to expect. He is generous and hospitable despite his fierce red face and black beard, and though we know that so far as the plot is concerned he is a

> threatening character, we cannot feel that the threat is very serious as we watch the jolly host laughing and leaping for joy or as we admire his skill in the hunt.[6]

As usual, when a duality exists in Bercilak's character or when a sinister note is introduced, the Gawain-poet also leaves a favorable option available to the reader. The duality of Bercilak's character is obvious and the juxtaposition serves to cloud and obscure his personality rather than clarify it. The ambiguity is deliberate and tends to avert any criticism that the reader might have about Bercilak becuase of his threatening nature. It is difficult to ascertain whether Bercilak is good or evil until he reveals his identity to Gawain and to us at the end of the poem. It is impossible to clearly define Bercilak, and until the end of the poem the reader finds himself restraining any criticism about Bercilak's threatening aspects because of his contradicting genial nature.

One of the reasons for the ambiguity of Bercilak's personality is the way the reader sees the character. The description of Bercilak is related by Gawain and most of the information is colored by Gawain's perceptions. The first description of Bercilak (ll. 842-849) is Gawain's view of his host because the description is bracketed by "Gawayn gly3t" (Gawain looked--l. 842), and "as þe segge þu3t" (As the man [Gawain] thought--l.848). We must depend upon Gawain's limited opinion about the character of

Bercilak. Consequently we see Bercilak's uncourtly actions and we know that he is actually the Green Knight, but Gawain's recounting of the courteous reception by his host negates any sinister implications. Furthermore, Gawain's viewpoint and Bercilak's actions are not mediated by a view into Bercilak's thoughts. We never know what Gawain's host is thinking. In affirmation Spearing states that: "so far as the Green Knight himself is concerned, though he, like all the other characters, is thoroughly articulate in speech, there are only two points at which we are given even a hint of his inner thought and feelings. One is in his Sir Bertilak role, when Gawain arrives at his castle and discloses who he is, and Sir Bertilak gives with a loud laugh, "so lef hit hym thoght' (909)."[7] This is the only time the reader sees Bercilak's thoughts in the feast scenes. Since we do not have any other information either to confirm or to deny one side or the other of his nature, the reader must wait until he reveals his identity at the end.

Prior to examining what happens at the end of the poem it is necessary to examine Gawain's character in relation to Bercilak. In considering Gawain's character A. C. Spearing makes the following observation about descriptions of the hero: "we are never given any external description of Gawain's appearance, comparable with that of the Green

Knight just mentioned or that of the lord of the castle at lines 843-9."[8] In the absence of any direct description, the reader must look for other information to characterize him. In the chapter on courtesy I noted that Feast I details a description of the court at Camelot and we see Gawain in relation to the court. Feast I does not describe Gawain, but it does establish his place as a member of the court. Since the description in the Christmas feast at Camelot emphasizes the courtly courtesy of Arthur's court, the reader by association can attribute those traits to Gawain. In the first farewell feast (Feast II) we see the hero beginning his journey to the Green Chapel. He is physically removing himself from the court and by implication it appears that Gawain is moving away from the courtly virtues connected with Camelot. The knight's appearance at Bercilak's castle then appears to negate the idea that Gawain is moving away from his courteous qualities. Even though the reader sees the Gawain-poet disassociate the hero from Camelot, the perception we have of him at Bercilak's castle is still the Camelot courtier. The reader sees Gawain through the eyes of Bercilak's court, and they clearly associate courtly virtues with Gawain:

'Now schal we semlych se sle3te3 of þewe3
& þe teccheles termes of talkyng noble;
Wich spede is in speche, vnspurd may we lerne,

Syn we haf fonged þat fyne fader of nurture;
God hat3 geuen vs his grace godly forsoþe,
Ðat such a gest as Gawan graunte3 vs to haue,
When burne3 blyþe of his þurþe schal sitte
& synge.
In menyng of manere3 mere
Ðis burne now schal vs bryng,
I hope þat may hym here
Schal lerne of luf-talkyng.'

(ll. 916-927)

'Now shall we see a comely example of manners
and the spotless terms of noble talking;
What profit is in speech, unasked may we learn,
Since we have received that fine father of good-breeding;
Truly God has given us his grace in goodly manner,
That such a guest as Gawain (He) grants us to have,
When joyful men of his birth shall sit
and sing.
In understanding of [the] noble manners
This man shall now bring us,
I hope that with him here
Shall learn of love-talking.'

In particular phrases, "semlych se sle3te3 of þewe3", "teccheles termes of talkyng noble", "fader of nurture", "manere3 mere", and "luf-talkyng", the people of Bercilak's court repeatedly attribute the characteristics of courtly manners to Gawain. Benson also remarks on Gawain's courtly courtesy, but he stresses the phrase "luf-talkyng" (love-talking--l. 927) as being evidence of Gawain's reputation as a lover: "when Gawain arrives at Bercilak's castle his conventional character as a lover is repeatedly stressed. Bercilak's attendants make as much of Gawain's courtesy as the narrator does, but they link it with 'luf-talkyng' (v. 927) rather than chastity, and they regard Gawain not as Mary's knight but as a famous and experienced

lover."[9] Based upon the information available in the text it is difficult to agree with Benson's argument about the stress placed upon Gawain's reputation as a lover. Indeed, the Gawain-poet suggests the knight is learned in "luf-talkyng," not love-making. Initially the reader sees the precise chivalric world of Camelot with which we associate Gawain and derive his characteristics from this association. Next Bercilak's courtiers give us an opinion concerning Gawain's character and again it stresses only the courtly courtesy of the knight. It is difficult not to agree with John Gardner: "Benson's interpretation of Gawain's 'fame' as sexual is not supported by the poem, which speaks only of chaste courtly manners, love-talking."[10] Based only upon the association with Arthur's court in Feast I and the discourse among the courtiers in Feast III the reader sees Gawain only as a courtly knight who embodies the virtue of courtesy.

With the end of Feast III, Bercilak's Christmas Eve Feast, it is difficult to explicitly establish the character of the hero because he appears as a courteous courtier, and then he seems to move away from this role. Gawain is then switched back into the courtly knight role when we see him through the perceptions of Bercilak's court. It is precisely this change in viewpoint from Gawain's view of the court to the courtiers' view of Gawain that helps

to establish his character as a courtier. When Gawain's viewpoint is utilized, we often see things not as they really are, but as Gawain sees them. Gawain is not necessarily an accurate judge of the reality of his own experience. Spearing contends that Gawain's viewpoint at times colors even the omniscient viewpoint of the narrator: "it is true that Gawain's point of view often acts as a kind of magnet, so that it and the assumptions by which it is shaped are sometimes projected onto the narrator himself."[11] Bercilak's courtiers serve to establish Gawain's character as a courtly knight and clarify the ambiguity caused by the contrasting perspective in Feast II.

Gawain's viewpoint, however, cannot be totally disregarded simply because his is a limited perspective. As mentioned above, the hero's viewpoint related things not always as they are, but rather as he sees them. Indeed, Gawain's viewpoint serves to obscure Bercilak's character and creates discrepancies in the host's personality, but the picture is not totally negative. While his limited perspective tends to obscure incidents or characters, his opinions tell the reader something about Gawain. The items that register the greatest impression on the hero are the traits that are the most important to him. Gawain's account of Bercilak concerns all the courtly elegance of

the castle and the gracious cordiality of his genial host. Obviously Gawain's reality is the courtly standard of courtesy. Interestingly, Gawain's perceptions concern the courtly virtues in each of the succeeding feast scenes. These virtues may be the significant principle in Gawain's mind because he still hopes to save his neck by remaining virtuous. It does not necessarily mean that he adheres to the ideal of courtly courtesy. Indeed, other information in the remaining feast scenes indicates his violation of this ideal. One should also note that Gawain's viewpoint relates his impression of his host's behavior and this viewpoint provides a link between the two characters. Once Gawain's character and Bercilak's dual nature are established in Feasts I-III, the link between the two characters becomes stronger. At Bercilak's Christmas feast Gawain is not only the courteous knight but also a reflection of the uncourtly nature of Bercilak.

At the end of the Christmas feast (Feast IV) Bercilak thanks Gawain for being his guest. Gawain replies in a way which is characteristic of his courtly manners. He feels that the honor was his to be a guest, but most notably Gawain considers himself at the command of Bercilak and bound and beholden to his host:

& I am, wy3e, at your wylle, to worch youre hest,
As I am halden þer-to in hy3e & in lo3e,
bi ri3t.'

(ll. 1039-1041)

And I am, sir, at your will, to perform your bidding,
As I am beholden thereto in high and in low,
by rights.'

Gawain's remark, that he will perform Bercilak's bidding ("worch youre hest"--l. 1039) and that he is beholden to his host in all things ("As I am halden þer-to in hy3e & in lo3e"--l. 1040), is a rash statement because Gawain is not in a situation which allows him to do his host's bidding. When Bercilak asks Gawain to stay as his guest, Gawain must refuse his host's invitation because he has promised to meet the Green Knight on New Year's Day:

Þe lorde fast can hym payne
To holde lenger þe kny3t,
To hym answre3 Gawayn
Bi non way þat he my3t.

(ll. 1042-1045)

The lord earnestly troubled himself
To hold the knight longer,
To him Gawain answered
There was no way that he might.

The promise to the Green Knight suggests a greater commitment than Gawain's offer to do Bercilak's bidding, which is more an overly courteous reply to his host's thanks. Still the rash remark places Gawain in a discourteous situation when he follows his offer to do as Bercilak wishes with a refusal of his host's invitation. One wonders if Bercilak was trying to trick Gawain into committing a dis-

courteous act; this would be in keeping with the threatening side of Bercilak's dual nature. The offer, however, to do whatever Bercilak wished came unsolicited from Gawain. In fact, Gawain had an advantage when Bercilak thanked the knight for the honor of having him as a guest. Bercilak's thanks appear to be sincere and contain nothing of a sinister or tricking sense. Indeed Bercilak is the one who extricates Gawain from a difficult situation by offering to show him the location of the Green Chapel and then offering a second invitation to his guest. When Bercilak issues another invitation, Gawain accepts his offer and reasserts his good manners:

> Mon shal yow sette in waye
> Hit is not two myle henne.'
>
> Þenne wat3 Gawan ful glad, & gomenly he
> la3ed,--
> 'Now I þonk yow þryuandely þur3 alle oþer
> þynge.
>
> (ll. 1077-1080)

> A man shall set you on your way,
> It [the Green Chapel] is not two miles hence.'
>
> Then was Gawain full glad, and joyfully he
> laughed,--
> 'Now I thank you heartily beyond all other
> things.

If a churlish note is introduced, it is by Gawain who must renege on a rash promise to his host. His uncourtly actions create a discrepancy in his character which is very similar to Bercilak's duality. Gawain's courteous nature immedi-

ately rectifies his initial action. He has very little choice but to accept the second invitation because of his initial discourtesy. In considering the necessity to accept Bercilak's offer Burrow makes this observation: "Gawain's two promises are not mere courtesies--he is 'halden' to obey his host 'bi ri3t'; and his obligation to fulfill the second is all the stronger because he has been forced to break the first as soon as it was made, by refusing the host's invitation to stay any longer."[12] One may consider this fault in Gawain's courteous nature similar to the diversion caused by the journey away from Camelot. As I previously noted, Gawain's courteous character was again reaffirmed by his own as well as other viewpoints. Certainly Gawain's courteous nature is also re-established immediately and quite directly. One cannot forget that this discrepancy in Gawain's nature occurs immediately after the discrepancies in Bercilak's personality are implied. Although Gawain does remain courteous in the next two feast scenes, the reader sees him struggling with the churlish aspect of his character.

Particularly in Feast V, the banquet following the second day of hunting, we see the hero at odds with his natural desire to return the lady's affections. An acknowledgment of the lady's advances would nevertheless constitute an affront to his host and so Gawain must make

an effort to curb what would be a churlish action:

> Þat al for-wondered wat3 þe wy3e, & wroth with hym-seluen,
> Bot he nolde not for his nurture nurne hir a-3ayne3
>
> (ll. 1660-1668)

> That all amazed was the man, and angry with himself,
> But were it not for his good breeding he would make advances.

Emphasis on the discrepancy in Gawain's character is greater in the farewell feast. Feast VI, Bercilak's farewell feast, occurs after Gawain has accepted the girdle and hidden it from his host. In Feast III, the Christmas Eve feast at Bercilak's castle in which we only suspected an evil intent from Bercilak, Gawain violates his courtly virtues by hiding the girdle from his host. Therefore his courteous behavior at the feast adopts a sinister meaning. This hidden action tinges his courteous behavior with a tone of wrong-doing. If we did not know that Gawain had breached his courtesy, he would appear to be the ideal courtier in his leave-taking of the host and court:

> Vche mon þat he mette, he made hem a þonke
> For his seruyse & his solace & his sere pyne
> Þat þay wyth busynes had be aboute hym to serue
>
> (ll. 1984-1986)

> Each man that he met, he gave a thanks and
> For their service and their entertainment and their different troubles
> That they had served him with eagerness.

Because of his discourteous action and his insistence on maintaining a courteous facade, the duality of Gawain's nature is obvious and reflects the discrepancy we noted earlier in Bercilak's character. The Gawain-poet has suggested the duality of Bercilak's personality throughout the poem and now he has established the same duality in Gawain. Burrow comments upon this point:

> Both the behaviour and (so far as one is allowed to see) the feelings of everyone involved here are exemplary--the ladies, with their 'cold sighings', ladylike, the men manly, everyone warmly courteous. Yet we know, after all, that the departing guest is both deceiver and deceived. It is an antinomy which the poet does not yet need to resolve. He has had it both ways with the lord and lady from the start; and he is equally content here to have it both ways with the hero.[13]

Previously the poet had established the duality of Bercilak and now he allows Gawain to take on the color of his host. Bercilak's duality had never been resolved and now it is uncertain whether Gawain's churlish nature will predominate or if he will redeem himself as he did in Feast IV, at Bercilak's Christmas feast. The poet finally clarifies the ambiguity when he reunites the two characters at the Green Chapel in the last feast scene.

The last feast scene constitutes only Gawain's double refusal to Bercilak's invitation to return to the feast, (Feast VII). Short as it is Gawain's refusal helps to resolve the ambiguous duality of Bercilak's personality and

clarifies the discrepancies we have noted in Gawain's character. In Feast VII one side of Bercilak's and Gawain's dual nature dominates the scene. Gawain's action solidifies the churlish element in his personality and Bercilak, in the character of the vulgar Green Knight, exhibits the courteous nature of a genial host as he twice asks Gawain to return to his castle:

> & 3e schal in þis nwe 3er a3ayn to my wone3,
> & we schyn reuel þe remnaunt of þis ryche fest
> ful bene.'
> Þer laþed hym fast þe lorde.
>
> (ll. 2400-2403)

> And you shall in this New Year again to my house,
> And we shall spend in revelry the remainder of this rich feast
> full well.'
> The lord invited him earnestly.

> Make myry in my hous, my meny þe louies,
> & I wol þe as wel, wy3e, bi my faythe.
>
> (ll. 2468-2469)

> Make merry in my house, my household loves you,
> And as I will as well, man, by my faith.

Bercilak's humanity is obvious in his forgiveness and more importantly his attempt at reconciliation. The invitation seems sincere and genuine because it is not marred by suggestions of a devious motive or the introduction of a sinister note. Furthermore the absence of any threatening note clarifies the ambiguity concerning Bercilak's character. He clearly establishes himself as the genial host who reflects the courteous virtues usually attributed to

Gawain. Benson not only sees Bercilak's invitation as an affirmation of his genial traits but also as a combination of the dual natures existing in his character: "when the Green Knight reveals his identity, praises Gawain, and invites him back to the castle for a merry feast, the two aspects of his character as challenger and host are combined; he remains grotesque in appearance and he still ignores the rules of courtesy and addresses Gawain in the singular, but he is now as admirable and sympathetic as Gawain himself."[14] I do not doubt Mr. Benson's interpretation if one examines the entire poem. The feast scenes do not provide enough information to suggest the combination of the hero's personality and the challenger's personality in the character of Bercilak. In this paper it is impossible to consider the personality of the challenger because he does not appear as the challenger in any of the feast scenes. Instead the reader sees a dual nature in the genial host because of the sinister suggestions. The suggestions are never confirmed because the feast scenes fail to provide any real information about the churlishness of Bercilak's character. Instead all the information seems to portray Bercilak as a gracious host. This image is finally confirmed in Feast VII, the refusal at the Green Chapel. Here we see him as the courteous courtier and any sinister suggestion is totally eliminated. The emphasis

upon Bercilak's genial nature in the preceding feast scenes seems to indicate how the Green Knight-Bercilak will reveal himself later. The feast scenes serve as guide-posts to Bercilak's revelation at the end of the poem.

The combination of characters which Benson suggests seems more applicable to Gawain's character. In this situation the feast scenes depict a dual nature--the courtly knight in Feasts I-III and the indications of churlish traits in Feasts IV-VI. With the affirmation of Gawain's churlish nature in Feast VII, the two aspects of his character merge to create a human figure. Initially Gawain's action in Feast VII repeats his discourteous behavior in Feast IV when he refused and then accepted his host's double invitation. In Feast IV Gawain was discourteous to Bercilak by refusing his invitation, but quickly redeemed his rude action by accepting the second invitation. In Feast VII the action is repeated. Gawain's churlish nature predominates when he refuses Bercilak's request to return to the feast. The hero does not rectify his actions, but he again breaches his courtesy by refusing the second request. Based on the previous incident in Feast IV Gawain's double refusal violates the courteous ideal. It is clear that the man who exemplified the courtly virtues also possesses churlish attributes. The discourteous and the courteous characteristics combine in the personality

of Gawain. This feast reveals the fault of the perfect courtier and consequently Gawain appears as a human figure because of his failing. Feast VII serves to establish the creation of a new Gawain figure. It remains for the rest of the poem to ascertain whether he will reconcile the two aspects of his personality, and to determine what his future actions will be.

CHAPTER IV

ROMANTICISM AND REALISM

I have examined in the previous chapters Gawain's discourteous fault and his consequent development from an ideal courteous knight to a more human figure. As Gawain undergoes a humanizing character change, he also moves away from his romantic idealism to a recognition of reality. Arnold Kettle explains the difference between romanticism and realism: "the words 'realism' and 'realistic' are used throughout this book in a very broad sense, to indicate 'relevant to real life' as opposed to 'romance' and 'romantic,' by which are indicated escapism, wishful thinking, unrealism."[1] Romanticism in the feast scenes does not necessarily refer to the romantic tradition of knights and chivalry but rather to the perfect figures who do not deal with the actual problems and values of everyday life. One must be careful not to confuse the romantic tradition with the romanticism or idealism in the feast scenes.

An examination of Feast I, the Christmas feast at Camelot, best portrays the idealism in the feast scenes. Superior youth and beauty and ceremonial courtesy create an idyllic Camelot where very little seems real. The

Gawain-poet portrays Camelot as being in the first age with young and gracious courtiers occupying the court. Beauty, excellence,and youth predominate in the description of the courtiers:

> Þe most kyd kny3te3 vnder Krystes seluen,
> & þe louelokkest ladies þat euer lif haden,
> & he þe comlokest kyng þat þe court haldes;
> For al wat3 þis fayre folk in her first age,
> (ll. 51-54)

> The most renowned knights under Christ himself,
> and the loveliest ladies that ever lives,
> and he the comeliest king the court had ever had;
> For all these fair folk were in their first age.

The ladies are the 'louelokkest", the knights are the "most kyd", and the king is the "comlokest". Indeed, the lively activity of youth also characterizes the king: "He wat3 so joly of his joyfnes, & sum-quat childgered" (He was so youthfully gay and somewhat childish in his behavior--l. 86). It is also important to note the implications of inexperience and innocence which the young age seems to carry with it. Camelot exhibits a spring-like atmosphere which is not reconciled to the realism of the cold January outside the walls of the court. Larry D. Benson summarizes this idea: "the time is the middle of winter, but we are never conscious of this fact at Arthur's court, where the tone is more like spring than a cold January and where the narrator calls the New Year the 'young year', emphasizing the season's youth."[2] More

specifically the courtiers are not aware of the outside world since the importance of their world lies in the courtly elegance of Camelot.

The Gawain-poet portrays the courtly traditions of Camelot and again refers to this courtliness in the character of Arthur. Rather than depict a powerful, mature ruler, the Gawain-poet stresses the youth of the king, and pictures an Arthur who attends to the ceremonial tradition of not eating until he sees a wonderous adventure. Benson observes that: "[Arthur] is above all a courtier whose every action is governed by ceremony. He will not eat until he sees or hears of some adventure (it is noteworthy that he wishes only to see or hear of, not take part in, some adventure) because of the custom that he through 'nobleness' has acquired."[3] This adherence to courtly tradition is also portrayed in the actions of the knights and ladies at Camelot.

This courtly behavior is characteristically joyous and happy, but an exact code of manners governs the Christmas activities. While the Christmas merry-making is real enough, an unreal precision controls the actions of the courtiers and the Christmas games. John Gardner explains the ceremonial behavior in the courtly celebration:

> There is shouting and merrymaking, but the shouts are praise of Noel, the merrymaking that which accompanies gay dancing of the formal carole and

> gift-giving according to definite rules. Though the poet refers to the brotherhood of the Round Table, he does not seat his knights at the round table of Arthurian legend, but seats them at higher and lower tables according to rank. When the meal is served, it is with due ceremony, the courses coming in proper order, properly announced.[4]

Initially the Christmas feast portrays the courtiers of Camelot engaged in their Christmas activities. One cannot ignore the superlative adjectives that are used to describe the people and the elegance of the court--the knights are the noblest, the ladies are the loveliest, the games the merriest and generally everything is the best. It is an idealistic court which conveys a spring-like innocence which is not reconciled to the real world outside the walls. The cold reality of the New Year does not concern the courtiers because courtly behavior and ceremony occupy their time and govern their behavior. Camelot is an idyllic world concerned with a precise code of manners and behavior.

Courtly elegance and happy celebration also characterize Bercilak's court, but the spring-like innocence does not exist there. In portraying the elegant furnishings which are similar to Camelot's surroundings the poet lingers upon the description of lavish furs, heavy tapestries, woven rugs, coverlets, and bright, blazing fires. While the poet depicts a world of elegance similar to Camelot, he also reminds the reader of the cold December outside

the castle. Benson makes a similar observation: "there are riches, beauty, and mirth at Bercilak's castle, too, but there we are never allowed to forget the world outside, and the blazing fires remind us of the winter even as the company feasts. . . . The warm fires and the consciousness of a world larger than the court, makes Bercilak's castle, the home of disguise and magic, a more 'realistic' place than Camelot."[5] The Gawain-poet presents the similarities between the courtliness of the two castles, but the actions of the courtiers are not staged into precision movements. The porter moves quickly to announce Gawain's arrival ("Þen 3ede þe wy3e [3are & com] a 3ayn swyþe"--l. 815), the men hasten to serve the hero ("Quen he hef vp his helme, þer hi3ed in-noghe/ For to hent hit at his honde, þe hende to seruen"--ll. 826-827), and even talking and mirth accompany his disarming ("Þer he wat3 dispoyled, wyth speche3 of myerþe"--l. 860). The meal is not served with the attention to rank as it was at Camelot,but rather the men serve him graciously ("Segge3 hym serued semly in-no3e"--l. 888) and joyfully hasten to be in his company ("& alle þe men in þat mote maden much joye/ To apere in his presense prestly þat tyme"--ll. 910-911). The courtiers' welcome and enthusiastic preparations are sincere and natural. While courtliness and elegance are present at both courts, a

natural reality and consciousness of the outside world, which are absent from Camelot, exist at Bercilak's court.

The beauty and youth associated with the Camelot courtiers does not exist in the description of Bercilak's court. Instead the beauty and youth are depicted in the description of Lady Bercilak:

> Ho wat3 þe fayrest in felle, of flesche & of lyre
> & of compas & colour & costes of alle oþer,
> & wener þen Wenore, as þe wy3e þo3t.[6]
>
> (ll. 943-945)

> She had the fairest skin, flesh and complexion
> and her proportion and manner were better than all others,
> and he thought that she was fairer than Guenevere.

Again the repetition of elements (beauty and youth) in Feast I occurs in this feast, but an element of reality is also injected. One notes that the elements of courtliness in Feast I were repeated in the Christmas Eve feast (Feast III), but the courtliness was very real and natural. Similarly, the repetition of youth and beauty also occurs in Feast III, but an element of reality is again injected through the description of Morgan. Unlike Camelot, and in contrast to the beautiful lady, is the ugly old woman:

> An oþer lady hir lad bi þe lyft honde,
> Þat wat3 alder þen ho, auncian hit semed,
> & he3ly honowred with haþele3 aboute.
> Bot vn-lyke on to loke þo ladyes were,
> For if þe 3onge wat3 3ep, 3ol3e wat3 þat oþer.
>
> (ll. 947-951)

Another lady led her by the left hand,
That was older than she, an ancient it seemed,
And highly honored by the men about.
But unlike to look on the ladies were,
For if the young one was fresh, withered was the other.

The old woman introduces the age and ugliness of a real situation and again brings a recognition of the problems and values of an outside wor d into Bercilak's court.

Most of the feast scenes contain this awareness of reality as well as containing elements of idealism. With the exception of the first part of Feast I, Camelot's Christmas festivities, no feast scene contains elements only of realism or of romanticism. The idealistic values depicted in the first part of Feast I characterize the court and brotherhood of the Round Table. The importance of the first part of the Christmas feast at Camelot is that this is where the foundations of Gawain's character are laid. As I discussed in the second chapter, there is no explicit description of Sir Gawain in Feast I. He is, however, clearly established as a member of the court; and, therefore, by association Gawain is characterized by the idealistic qualities attributed to the court. Gawain is portrayed as the idealistic courtier, adheres to the romantic ideal of courtesy in the succeeding feast scenes, and does not recognize reality until the last feast scene (Feast VII). Consequently, there can be no suggestion of realism in the feast scene which provides the initial por-

trait of the hero. In developing Gawain's character into a confrontation between his romantic ideal and the real world, the Gawain-poet usually balances the hero's romantic character with a note of reality in all of the following feast scenes (including the second part of Feast I). After establishing an idyllic Camelot and the romantic Gawain, the poet introduces a note of reality in the second part of Feast I. The king and Gawain return to dinner after the Green Knight leaves Camelot and Arthur attempts to dismiss the beheading challenge as a mere "craft" (skill--l. 471) which "Wel by-commes vpon cristmasse" (Well suits the christmas time--l. 471). Both Arthur and Gawain exhibit their courtesy by attempting to dismiss the apprehension of the courtiers and to restore the former gaiety of the Christmas celebration. It is the narrator who supplies the realistic note that while "Gawan wat3 to begynne þose gomne3 in halle" (Gawain was glad to begin those games in the hall--l. 495), it is not surprising that they end on a harsh chord because "men ben mery in mynde quen þay han mayn drynk" (Men are merry in mind when they have much drink--l. 497). Even the idealistic court at Camelot begins to exhibit tinges of reality in Feast II. Arthur holds a feast to honor Gawain before he begins his journey to the Green Chapel. An uncomfortable emotion taints the usually mirthful ladies and lords who now show an anxiety for the departing knight: ("Al for luf of þat lede in

longynge þay were"--l. 540). In this very real situation the courtiers attempt to maintain the idyllic atmosphere of the Christmas feast by hiding their sadness ("Bot neuer-þe-lece ne þe later þay neuened bot merþe/ Mony ioyle3 for þat ientyle iape3 þer maden"--ll. 541-542). Finally the reality of Gawain's sentence is totally obvious as the knight leaves Camelot. There is much hidden sorrow in the hall ("Þere wat3 much derne doel driuen in þe sale"--l. 558) as the courtiers recognize the reality of Gawain's sentence. One should note that because the poet introduces a note of reality into the otherwise idyllic court, he does not necessarily intend the reader to associate Gawain with this realism. Gawain is set apart from the other courtiers because the feast is held in his honor. Furthermore, he physically removes himself from Camelot and consequently disassociates himself from the court and their new found reality. It would seem that Gawain removes himself from everything connected with Camelot including the ideal courtliness which characterizes the hero in Feast I. So that the reader disassociates Gawain only from the reality of Camelot and not the romantic courtesy of the court, the Gawain-poet continues to emphasize the hero's idealistic courtliness in the succeeding feast scenes. Benson makes a similar observation: "the poet barely mentions these [warrior] aspects of

Gawain's knighthood. . . . His battles are quickly passed over in the narrative, whereas his courtly deeds are narrated at great length and his courtesy is mentioned again and again."[7]

In Feast V, following the second day of hunting, the poet confronts Gawain's idealistic commitment to courtly courtesy. The advances of Lady Bercilak confront Gawain with the reality of either offending his host by acknowledging her affections or of offending the lady by not recognizing her. It is a realistic dilemma which Gawain's idealism cannot handle. Instead of recognizing that his romantic commitment to courtesy cannot solve the problem, he idealistically attempts to fulfill his duty both to his host and to the lady.

Feast VI depicts a similar dilemma where Gawain does not face the real situation. The very real passion of wanting to save his life has caused Gawain to accept the magic girdle from the lady and hide it from his host. This human desire has caused him to violate his promise to Bercilak. His idealistic allegiance to courtesy has proved inadequate when confronted with a realistic situation. Instead of accepting the reality of his discourteous action, Gawain idealistically maintains a courtly show of manners as he courteously takes leave of his host and the court:

Þenne lo3ly his leue at þe lorde fryst
Fochche3 þis fre mon, & fayre he hym ponkke3.
(ll. 1960-1961)

First he humbly took his leave of the lord
Next he graciously thanked each noble man.

Vche mon þat he mette, he made hem a þonke
For his seruyse & his solace & his sere pyne
Þat þay wyth busynes had ben aboute hym to serue.
(ll. 1984-1986)

Each man that he met, he gave a thanks
For their service and their entertainment and their different troubles
That they had served him with eagerness.

The Gawain-poet combines romantic and realistic elements and portrays an idealistic Gawain operating in a realistic world without ever accepting reality.

In the romantic-realistic combination in Feasts V and VI, the Gawain-poet shows that the hero's romantic ideal is inadequate in solving the problems of a real world. At this point the reader is left with a hero who still does not recognize that inadequacy, but Feast VII helps to clarify the character of Gawain. At the Green Chapel Bercilak confronts Gawain with his fault and Gawain is forced to face reality. Bercilak's revelation that he knew about the hidden girdle forces Gawain to recognize the real situation. J. A. Burrow makes the point that Gawain's fault makes him a human character with whom the reader can identify: "by it [his fault] Gawain is

'levelled with the rest of the world', scaled down to become 'one of us'; and we 'respond to a sense of his common humanity'."[8] The revelation of his fault forces Gawain to recognize reality; it does not reveal if he accepts that reality. It is difficult to envision Gawain as "one of us" if he does not accept his fault and attempt to be a more human figure. Feast VII does not clarify this final step in the development of Gawain's character, but it does supply an indication of his future actions. When Gawain had earlier been faced with the reality of his fault, he chose not to recognize it and retreated into the security of his courteous ideal by maintaining a show of manners. In Feast VII he might have continued this facade and courteously returned to the feast. Instead he twice refuses Bercilak's invitation to return to the castle and abandons the pretense of manners. Gawain does not necessarily cast away his courtesy but rather he deserts the pretense of courtesy. When he does not continue the hypocritical action of Feast VI in Feast VII, one can believe that he is moving towards a real situation which will complete the humanization of Gawain.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the preceding pages I have attempted to reveal the significance of the feast scenes in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. When one examines the analogues for Sir Gawain, it becomes clear that the Gawain-poet did consciously expand and utilize the feast concept. Primarily, the feast scenes present situations and actions which trace the development of Gawain's character from a courteous courtier to a less perfect knight. Because of a discourteous fault, he is forced to recognize that his idealistic values are inadequate in dealing with the problems of a real world. Consequently, he must confront the churlish aspect of his nature and recognize reality. In so doing, Gawain is no longer the idealized perfect courtier but rather a more human figure. The Gawain-poet goes to great length to establish the hero's impeccable courteous character. He does, however, balance Gawain's idealism with realistic situations and begins to suggest churlish aspects in the hero's character. Although there is an implication of discourtesy in Gawain's personality, he appears to remain the courteous courtier. Gawain's character is not resolved until the last feast

scene when he churlishly refuses his host's invitation. While the last feast does not firmly establish Gawain's more human character, it does present the reader with a new Gawain who is very different from the Gawain we first see. Gawain's refusal to join Bercilak in a final feast indicates a realization on his part that he is not deserving of his host's hospitality. Furthermore, the discarding of his courteous facade indicates that Gawain is moving toward a recognition of his real character and a place among common humanity.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]Charles Moorman, The Pearl-Poet (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 88.

[2]Before one considers the significance of the feast scenes it is necessary to see if the Gawain-poet merely borrowed the feast concept, or if he expanded and developed the idea of the feast tradition. It is, therefore, necessary to examine sources and analogues in an effort to determine just what material was available to the Gawain-poet. I have examined all the English sources and analogues and all the available material in translation. These sources and analogues include the following: Fled Bricrend, Perlesvaus, The Grene Knight, The Turke and Gowin, Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle, Pwyll, The Principle of Manners: Rauf Coilyear, and Lanzelet. The only work not included in the discussion is Pwyll because it contained no relevant material to the feast scenes in Sir Gawain.

Since the Fled Bricrend from the Ulster Cycle of Cuchulainn tales, I have read as many Ulster Cycle stories as were available to me. Because the Fled Bricrend is

considered to be the source for Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, I hoped that one of the other Cuchulainn tales might provide a source for the feast scenes.

[3]Fled Bricrend, ed. and trans. George Henderson (London: Irish Texts Society, 1899), p. 17.

[4]Ibid., p. 71.

[5]"The Intoxication of the Ulstermen," in Ancient Irish Tales, ed. Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover (New York: Holt and Co., 1936), p. 219.

[6]Lanzelet, trans. Urlich Von Zatzikhoven, trans. into English by Kenneth G. T. Webster (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 103.

[7]Israel Gollancz, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 4. All further references to this text will be indicated by parenthetical notation of lines following the quotation.

[8]Since I am concerned with the meaning of the poem, I have provided literal, rather than poetic, translations for the textual quotations.

[9]Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore, "The Turke and Gowin," in Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, I, ed. John W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall (London: N. Trubner and Co.,

1867), p. 96.

[10]The High History of the Holy Graal, I, trans, Sebastian Evans (London: Dent and Co., 1898), p. 39.

[11]Percy, "The Turke and Gowin," p. 91.

[12]Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore, "The Grene Knight," in Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, II, ed. John W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall (London: N. Trubner and Co., 1868), p. 59.

[13]Ibid., pp. 69-70.

[14]"Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle," in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. Donald B. Sands (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 362-363.

CHAPTER II

[1]A. C. Spearing, The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 11.

[2]J. F. Kiteley, "The De Arte Honeste Amandi of Andreas Capellanus and the Concept of Courtesy in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Anglia, 79 (1961-62), p. 8.

[3]Marie Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 116.

[4]J. A. Burrow, A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 8.

[5]Borroff, p. 101.

[6]Alain Renoir, "An Echo to the Sense: The Patterns of Sound in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," English Miscellany, 8 (1962), 9-23.

[7]Burrow, p. 12.

[8]Ibid., p. 36.

[9]Spearing, pp. 201-202.

CHAPTER III

[1]hyghe--an exclamation used by huntsmen.

[2]J. A. Burrow, A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 566.

[3]A. C. Spearing, The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 219.

[4]Burrow, p. 59.

[5]Larry D. Benson, Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p. 87.

[6]Ibid., p. 94.

[7]Spearing, p. 178.

[8]Ibid., pp. 177-178.

[9]Benson, p. 104.

[10]John Gardner, "A Review," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 65 (1966), 706-708.

[11]Spearing, p. 232.

[12]Burrow, p. 67.

[13]Ibid., p. 112.

[14]Benson, pp. 94-95.

CHAPTER IV

[1]Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 28.

[2]Larry D. Benson, Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p.99 .

[3]Ibid., p. 97.

[4]John Gardner, The Complete Works of the Gawain-Poet

(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 73.

[5]Benson, pp. 100-101.

[6]The description of the two ladies does not actually take place at a feast. The introductions occur immediately preceding the second part of the Christmas Eve feast (Feast III). After the acquaintances are made the group moves right into the feast. Although the action does not happen during the feast, it is very closely related in time to the Christmas Eve banquet. Since the beauty of the lady parallels the beauty of the courtiers in Feast I, and the ugliness of Morgan contrasts the Camelot beauty, it appears that the poet intentionally wanted to relate the descriptions of the two ladies to Feast I.

[7]Benson, p. 108.

[8]J. A. Burrow, A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 183.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benson, Larry D. Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965.

Borroff, Marie. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.

Burrow, J. A. A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1966.

Fled Bricrend. Ed. and trans. George Henderson. London: Irish Texts Society, 1899.

Gardner, John. The Complete Works of the Gawain-Poet. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Gardner, John. "A Review." Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 65 (1966), 706-708.

Gollancz, Israel. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. London: Oxford University Press, 1940.

The High History of the Holy Graal, I. Trans. Sebastian Evans. London: Dent and Co., 1898.

"The Intoxication of the Ulstermen." Ancient Irish Tales. Ed. Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover. New York: Holt and Co., 1936.

Kettle, Arnold. An Introduction to the English Novel, I. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.

Kiteley, J. F. "The De Arte Honeste Amandi of Andreas Capellanus and the Concept of Courtesy in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Anglia, 79 (1961-62), 7-16.

Lanzelet. Trans. Ulrich Von Zatzikhoven. Trans. into English by Kenneth G. T. Webster. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951.

Moorman, Charles. The Pearl-Poet. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1968.

Percy, Thomas, Bishop of Dromore. "The Grene Knight." Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, II. Ed. John W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall. London: N. Trubner and Co., 1868.

Percy, Thomas, Bishop of Dromore. "The Turke and Gowin." Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, I. Ed. John W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall. London: N. Trubner and Co., 1867.

Renoir, Alain. "An Echo to the Sense: The Patterns of Sound in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." English Miscellany, 8 (1962), 9-23.

"Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle." Middle English Verse Romances. Ed. Donald B. Sands. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

Spearing, A. C. The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study. London: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

VITA

Elizabeth Riley Bell, daughter of John Traver Riley and Dorothy Campbell Riley, was born on June 23, 1947, in Darby, Pennsylvania. AFter graduating in June, 1965 from Southern Lehigh High School in Coopersburg, Pennsylvania, she attended Cabrini College for two years. She then transferred to Moravian College, from which she took her Bachelor of Arts degree in June, 1969. She then taught tenth and eleventh grade English in Teays Valley High School in Columbus, Ohio. Upon her resignation from this teaching position in 1970, she married Raymond Bell of Lazonby, England in December, 1970. She is presently engaged as a teacher of seventh and eighth grade English and reading while completing work toward her Master of Arts degree at Lehigh University.